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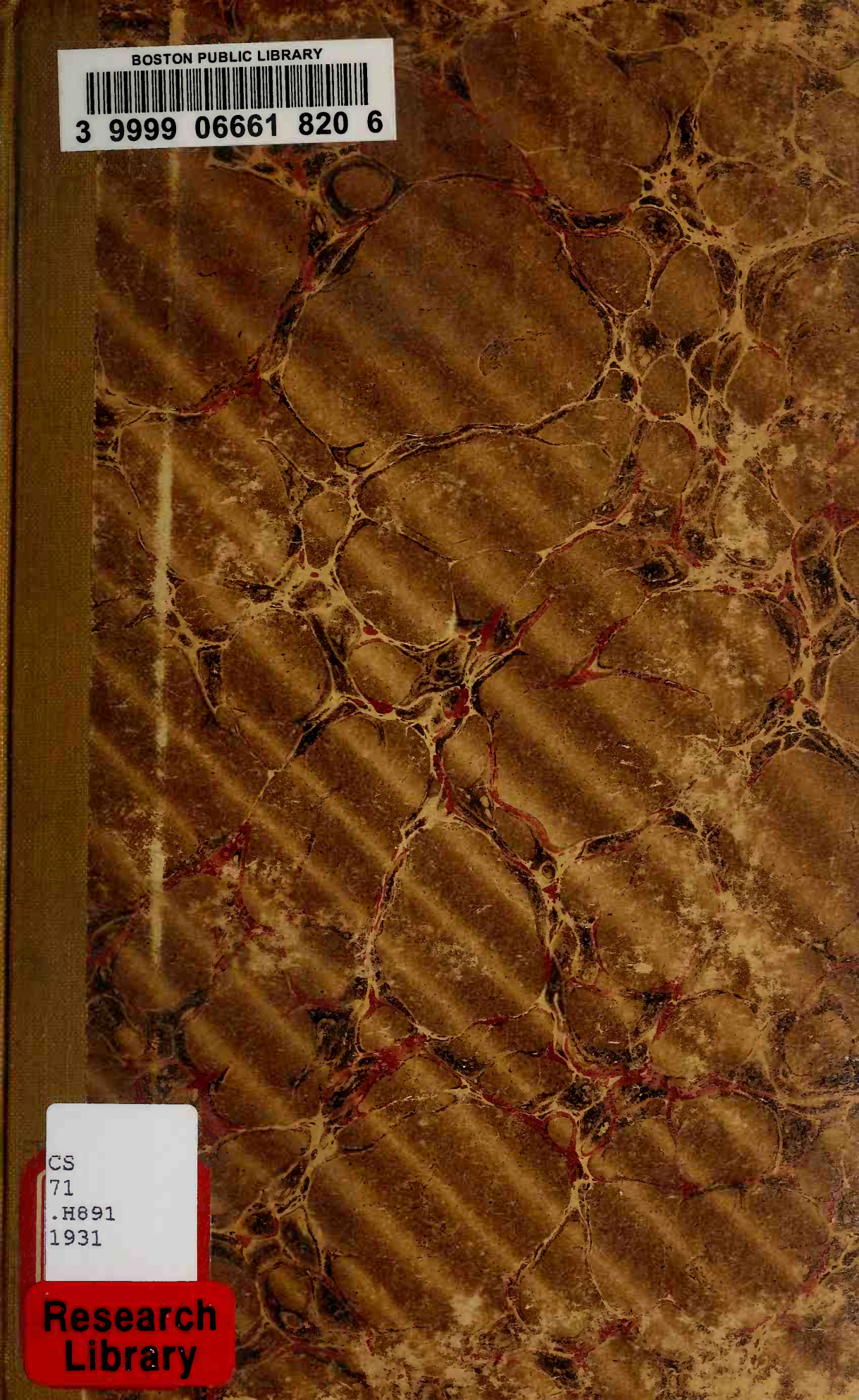

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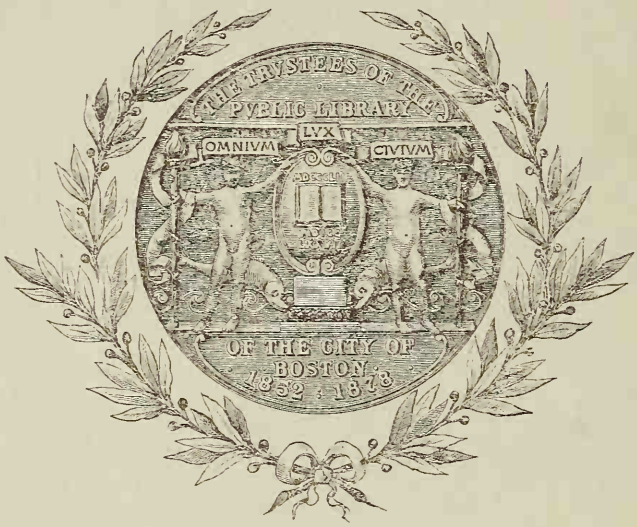

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T. Tileston Wells

The Hugers of South Carolina

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T. Tileston Wells, Litt. D.

PRIVATELY PRINTED

NEW YORK

1931

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J. Tilston Wells
April 17, 1931.

I.

Col. Francis Kinloch Huger

In 1776 there landed at North Island, near Georgetown, South Carolina, two men who had come from Europe to join the American forces, and who were to play important parts in the War of American Independence. One was the Marquis de Lafayette and the other the Baron de Kalb. The pamphlet "Olmutz" says that there may have been three, the two mentioned and Baron von Steuben, but I regard that as most unlikely. Their landing at that point was not intended, but was due to the presence of British cruisers and their fear of capture should they attempt to sail into Charleston harbour, their destination. Landing on North Island they went to the house of Major Benjamin Huger (the uncle of Mrs. John Wells, the second wife of the distinguished lawyer John Wells, III., 1770-1823),* as that was the most important house on that part of the coast. They were hospitably received and entertained, and afterwards were taken by Major Huger to Charleston, whence they journeyed North to offer their services to Congress.

At the time of Lafayette's visit to North Island, Major Huger's son, Francis Kinloch Huger, who was destined to play in after years such an important role in the dramatic life of Lafayette, was only three years old, having been born in Charleston in September, 1773.

In 1779 Major Benjamin Huger was killed before the lines of Charleston. Two years later his widow being advised to send her son to England on account of his delicate health, entrusted the boy to a stranger, a young Englishman, returning to his country, who placed the lad then eight years old in a public school, and except for a brief visit to South Carolina, when he was about eighteen years old, he remained abroad till the completion of his education and medical studies, the latter under the distinguished surgeon, Mr. John Hunter, in London.

In 1794 Mr. Huger, led by his interest in military affairs, set sail for Antwerp, the Headquarters of the Duke of York in his military operations in Flanders. Huger, on hearing that surgeons

*NOTE—I have numbered all the John Wellses from the original settler, whom I call "John Wells, I". My great grandfather John Wells thus becomes "John Wells, III".—T. T. W.

were much needed there, offered his services and was engaged on the Medical Staff of the British Army where for some months he performed signal service for the wounded in his care. Having finally seen the wounded sent safely back to England, he resigned and went on to Vienna, to pursue his medical studies. While in Vienna he made the acquaintance of Dr. Justus Eric Bollman, a native of Hanover, of about twenty-five years of age, whom he found to be particularly interested in America, its institutions and distinguished men, and especially in General Lafayette and his attachment for America. Huger then told Bollman of General Lafayette's visit to his father's house on North Island, when he was a child of three.

One day Dr. Bollman, impressed with the aristocratic appearance of young Huger, who is said to have resembled an English lad of the upper classes, and satisfied that he was bold and adventure loving, called on Huger and said that he had lately become engaged on business of importance, which he was about to disclose to him, feeling certain that Huger would not betray him. Bollman then told the story of how some years before he had been in Paris after the beginning of the Revolution and there had become acquainted with some of the leaders of the day, who had appealed to him for assistance to enable M. de Narbonne, the former Minister of War, to escape to England from Paris, where he was proscribed and in hiding. In this Bollman had succeeded. Through this he had become acquainted with the Princesse d'Hénin, Lally-Tollendal, Mr. and Mrs. Church of New York, Major Pinckney, the American Minister in London and others. At that time General Lafayette had already left France and had been arrested by Prussian troops, turned over by them to the Austrians and imprisoned at Neisse, from where he had been removed; but since his removal no definite news of him had been received and it was not known where he was and his friends were anxious. Dr. Bollman said that he had been persuaded by some of the General's friends to endeavour to find the place of imprisonment and to make an effort to secure the General's liberation.

He had discovered that the General was imprisoned in the Austrian fortress of Olmutz. Of this he had assured himself by making the acquaintance of the Surgeon of the fortress, and by a clever pretence of knowing that Lafayette was there, induced the unwary physician to answer that the General was in fairly good health, and he even undertook to present Dr. Bollman's compliments and the assurances that the General's friends in England

were well. This was answered by a polite message from the General, asking further questions about his friends. The message in reply was (as intended) rather difficult for the German Doctor's memory and pronunciation, and looking about for a piece of paper to write the English names on, Bollman found in his pocket, as if by chance, a piece of paper, on which he wrote the names in the Doctor's presence, showing the paper to him, and adding a line of apparently no consequence; "Quand vous aurez lu ceci mettez le au feu." The General rightly interpreted these last words, and when alone, put the scrap of paper to the fire, instead of into it, and discovered it was closely written in lemon juice, informing him of the efforts of his English friends to rescue him by the assistance of Dr. Bollman, who now requested some answer and information, as to the best time and mode of making the attempt, and any other particulars the General could give him.

The next day the unsuspecting doctor carried a book from Dr. Bollman to the General requesting him to give his opinion of the work. The book was soon returned with a polite message, and on the margin written in lemon juice he found a letter giving the desired information.

General Lafayette wrote that an escape would be difficult, but he added that at certain times he rode out for a drive in the country in a phaeton, accompanied by an officer with a corporal for guard, and that then would be the time for his friends to ride up and help him to escape.

Having thus explained the situation to Mr. Huger, Dr. Bollman asked him if he were willing to risk joining him in this scheme to free General Lafayette, a scheme which as Dr. Bollman pointed out was full of difficulties and dangers. Knowing as we do the character of the Hugers there could be no doubt of what Mr. Huger's answer was, and these two comrades proceeded to put their plans into effect.

Next we see Dr. Bollman and Mr. Huger driving leisurely through the country, apparently on a sight-seeing tour, in a light carriage and having two spare riding horses, young Huger assuming the character of a young English nobleman and Bollman that of his tutor. They travelled in this way slowly to Olmutz—the gentlemen generally riding and the servants in the carriage with the luggage. When they arrived at Olmutz they went to the inn of the Three Swans, which was the same inn Dr. Bollman had stopped at

before, saying that they were now on their way to England. Dr. Bollman sent word to General Lafayette of his return, and received a note in reply, asking that they arrange to intercept him on his return from his next drive. As Dr. Bollman had never met Gen. Lafayette, and Mr. Huger had seen him only once when he was a child of three, some arrangement had to be made by which they would recognize him and the General suggested that when they met and bowed to him he would draw a white handkerchief across his brow. All being arranged, Bollman and Huger waited two days, amusing themselves in the town, going to the theatre, and watching for the time that the General should drive into the country. Finally they paid their bill at the inn, and as if about to continue their journey, sent their carriage and servants ahead to Hoff, a small town on the frontier, directing their servants to wait for them there; and mounting their horses rode through one of the gates of the town and into the country. They had procured passports and taken every precaution they could think of. One of their horses was trained to carry two persons, as they felt they could not have a lead horse with them without causing suspicion; Lafayette was to ride one horse and Huger and Bollman the other. All worked as planned until Lafayette alighted from his carriage to walk with the officer. He seized the officer's sword and attempted to draw it from its scabbard, and while they were struggling for its possession, the horsemen galloped up, jumped from their horses and ran to the General's assistance, but unfortunately the horse that was to have carried Lafayette became frightened, broke loose and ran off. The officer was quickly overpowered, the corporal had already run away, so they told the General to mount the remaining horse and ride to Hoff, where they had planned to meet. But Lafayette not knowing the plan and being unfamiliar with the country, and not fully grasping what was said to him, or mistaking "to Hoff" for "be off", took the wrong road and came finally to a town where he was recognized, arrested and taken back to Olmutz and again locked up in the fortress-prison, where, however, he was treated about the same as before his attempt to escape. In the meantime Bollman and Huger had caught the horse which had escaped, but it not being trained to carry two riders, fell and threw them. They made a second attempt with no better result, when Huger insisted that Bollman should go on alone, as he knew the country and the language better. To this Bollman objected, but finally yielded and succeeded in reaching the frontier, but failing to find Lafayette, waited about and was arrested and sent back to

Olmutz, where his treatment was virtually the same as that meted out to Huger. Huger in the meantime had tried to escape on foot, but by that time the prison authorities had been notified by the corporal who, the moment Lafayette's rescue had been attempted, had run back to the fortress to give the alarm. Therefore Huger was quickly overtaken and brought before a Magistrate in the Town Hall. An interpreter was assigned to him, who knew both French and English and translated Huger's answers into German. This was Professor Passi who always remained kind and friendly.

At the end of the examination a commitment was made out and Huger was taken to the prison by a file of soldiers, and put into what might be called the felon's den. This was a large room with several occupants, all in chains, some fastened to the wall and others to a long bar which enabled them to shuffle from one end of the room to the other. Each had a sort of bench which served as both seat and bed, with some straw and a thick rug for blanket and mattress; a pitcher of water and some black bread were placed near at hand. Then he was ironed round one ankle and a wrist, the chains being fastened high above his head. His companions appeared to be low criminals, dirty and repulsive. They questioned him about himself, after which Huger thought they looked at him with more respect and said, "Oh, your's is a political crime, they will not keep you here long." The third day he was taken to a solitary cell where he was chained in the same way. Then followed daily examinations before a Magistrate to which he was taken, still in chains, by a file of soldiers, through the streets; later the Court was held in the prison building. During these examinations the effort was made to have him confess a plot. He always answered the Judges that he had told them everything on the first day's examination, and that there was nothing further to tell. Huger one day protested to Professor Passi about his ill treatment, especially as he felt that his actions had done no harm to any one, and as he was doing so an old gentleman walked up to him, who proved to be Count d'Arco, the Commandant of the fortress of Olmutz, a Venetian by birth, who told Huger that this attempt to rescue Lafayette had greatly injured his (d'Arco's) credit at Court and might even be the cause of his losing his post as Commandant, but he added that were he ever in trouble and in need of a friend he should certainly wish him to be an American. Some time after this on again meeting Count d'Arco, while waiting for his continued examination, Huger again protested about his treatment, where-

upon Count d'Arco said, "Do you know what is the punishment awarded for the crime which you acknowledge—of trying to free a prisoner of State?" "No!" "Well the penalty is death!" Count d'Arco died before Bollman and Huger were liberated.

In about three months when the examinations showed that there was no widespread plot, the situation of the prisoners improved, and Huger was removed from the small dungeon to a higher and better apartment above ground, less damp and having one window high up on the wall, admitting some light; the chains were longer and admitted of taking three steps, but no books were allowed, and his request for his trunks and property was refused, but still he felt he was treated in a more kindly way. He learned that Bollman was in the room just over his, and through the jailor's wife he was able from time to time to send messages to his friend. Finally Huger was able to persuade the jailor to post a letter addressed to Mr. Pinckney, the American Minister in London, which letter read as follows:

"I have just a moment to inform you of my health, and entreat you to write my mother, and enclose this scrap of paper for her comfort. Our sentence is not yet known, though I have been flattered with the hope of being shortly free. Mr. Bollman is in the same prison, but has been prevented from giving full accounts of the circumstances that caused our failure. Mons. de La F. would certainly have escaped, but was known at a small town where he changed his horse; he had already mounted a fresh one when stopped. His treatment is the same as before. Bollman is in chains, and we are not allowed to see each other. Don't forget us.

F. K. H."

Olmutz, Jan. 5th, 1795.

And again on February 17th, 1795, Mr. Huger, fearing his first letter had miscarried wrote a second one to Mr. Pinckney in London of about the same purport but longer. Both of these letters are believed to have reached Mr. Pinckney.

Whether by reason of these letters or by reason of the intervention of his friends and family Mr. Huger's imprisonment was brought to the attention of the American Government. How insignificant the United States was at that time, how little it was respected by the powers, and how few means it had at its disposal for the protection

of its people, and how great is the contrast between those days and the present, the following letter to Mr. Huger's uncle Mr. Kinloch, from the American Secretary of State will show:

Department of State
September 16th, 1795.

Sir:—

The President of the United States, now at Mt. Vernon, has sent me your letter to him, dated New Port, Rhode Island, of the 16th inst., which he has directed me to acknowledge. The President's benevolence and his respect for the connections of Mr. F. K. Huger, would prompt him to adopt any particular measure for obtaining his release, but besides that the cause of Mr. Huger's confinement would render an application delicate and difficult, the United States having no public functionary in the Austrian dominions, where General Lafayette and Mr. Huger are in durance, the President knows not any channel through which a movement of this kind could at present be made.

I am, respectfully

Your obd't servant

To Francis Kinloch, Esq. Timothy Pickering.

That President Washington did not look with indifference or disapprobation upon the effort of his young and distinguished countryman, although diplomatic necessities and the weakness of the young nation prevented his intervention in the matter, was distinctly expressed. Soon after Mr. Huger's release and return to America, and being in Philadelphia, then the seat of government of this country, where President Washington resided, he was invited to dine with the President. It was a strictly family dinner, of only five or six persons, and after dinner the General spoke to Mr. Huger of the effort which he had made to liberate his friend Lafayette, and said that he had watched all these events, and wished that the attempt might have met with the success it had deserved. These words of approval by General George Washington were deemed a full reward by young Huger for all he had gone through.

We must now return for a moment to the trial in the prison-fortress of Olmutz. As time went on and the trial proceeded the prisoners were allowed to meet in the presence of others, and Pro-

fessor Passi, the interpreter, always showed his kindly interest, and told them that they had friends who were working in their favor. Afterwards they discovered that he particularly alluded to the nobleman in whose family he was tutor, a Count Mitrowsky, who had taken the pains to get their case favourably represented at Court, and had not spared his money to influence the Judge to render as lenient a decision as possible in their case. Still the tedious days of the trial dragged on for some months more, but before it ended they were allowed to walk twice a week in the courtyard an hour each, this they much appreciated and attributed it to the efforts of the kind and unknown friends whom the story of their adventures had made for them.

Finally the judgment and sentence was announced. It was: One month's captivity in light irons, to labor on the public works during that time, and then banishment from the Austrian dominions for life.

They were told that this was considered a very mild punishment for their acts. However they were greatly pleased to learn in a few days that their sentence had been commuted to fourteen days further confinement and banishment, a result which they attributed to the efforts of their various unknown friends.

The two young men were together when this news was announced to them. Professor Passi was also there and told them that he and other friends advised that they should leave immediately after they had signed the paper promising to observe the order of banishment. On the day of departure Passi told them that their passports were ready, a carriage ordered, and all arrangements made beforehand. Their trunks and clothes were restored to them. Fortunately after some eight months of close imprisonment they were both in good health. Professor Passi took them to the house of their unknown but generous friend, Count Mitrowsky, who with his two daughters welcomed them and invited them to a little supper he had had prepared for them. Our young friends were disposed to linger, but Professor Passi was anxious that they should leave as soon as possible, and told them that post-horses had been ordered for them all along the road to the frontier, where they arrived without delay or mishap. Years afterward Mr. Huger learned from General Lafayette that it was very fortunate that they had not tarried near Olmutz, for they had hardly crossed the frontier when an order had been received from Vienna to quash the proceedings of the Court and to hold the prisoners for a new trial, the result of which would probably have been far different, as it was known that the

Emperor was displeased with the leniency of the sentence.

General Lafayette continued to be held as a prisoner until the treaty of Campo Formio, in which Napoleon had insisted on inserting a clause to free Lafayette, was signed in 1797. However when freed Lafayette found that the Directoire, which then ruled France, would not permit him to return. He was not able to re-enter France till two years later, in 1799.

Mr. Huger after leaving Olmutz returned to America and continued his medical studies at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and there received his degree of M. D. in the Medical School. He never practised medicine however, but became a planter at Santee, South Carolina. When it seemed that war was about to break out between France and the United States, he was commissioned without solicitation on his part, a Captain in the Regular Army. After the trouble had passed he resigned from the Army and returned to his planting.

In 1802 he married a daughter of General Thomas Pinckney. In 1812 he was commissioned a Lieut.-Col. in the 2nd Regiment of Artillery, U. S. A. On April 6th, 1813, he was promoted to be Colonel, and made Adjutant General, and served as such till the end of the war, when he resigned. After the war of 1812, he was a member of the South Carolina Legislature for several terms, serving in both houses.

When General Lafayette returned, for his last visit to America, in 1824, Col. Huger went to New York to meet him, and there these two men, between whom there was such a bond of friendship, again met after some thirty years. Lafayette had said: "There is one man in America whom of all others I long to meet, a man whom I saw but for ten minutes, and that was thirty years ago, but I saw him under circumstances which engraved his countenance forever on my mind. I count the moments when I can embrace my good friend, Col. Huger, of South Carolina."

During this visit General Lafayette frequently expressed the warmest regard and admiration for Col. Huger, and when alone with him, took occasion to speak of the unexpected and generous gift just made him by the Congress of the United States, of lands in Florida, and said it would afford him much additional gratification could he be allowed to transfer to the name of his friend, a portion of these lands, as a useful provision for him and his family. The kind offer

was gratefully but firmly declined, Col. Huger saying that he had property sufficient for his daughters, and would teach his sons to work for themselves.

A miniature of Col. Huger was presented to General Lafayette, when he visited Charleston in 1825, by the City.*

In 1826, Col. Huger, with his family, moved to the healthful and pleasant neighborhood of Pendleton, where he made for himself a comfortable mountain home. Towards the close of his life he returned to Charleston, where he peacefully died on February 14, 1855, in the eighty-second year of his age.

Col. Huger had a son, Benjamin Huger, who served with great distinction in the Mexican War, receiving three brevets, in the Civil War he became a Major General in the Confederate Army.

A bronze medallion to the memory of Francis K. Huger was unveiled at the University of Pennsylvania on November 5, 1909. Two replicas of the medallion were made, and one was given to the City of Charleston and the other to the South Carolina Historical Society.

A pamphlet was published by Dr. Bollman describing the attempt to liberate General Lafayette, dated August 1st, 1795, addressed to Mrs. Church, London. This lady was one of General Lafayette's American friends, who took deep interest in the success of Dr. Bollman's enterprise, which had been planned by the General's friends in London. The pamphlet relates the facts hereinabove set forth rather briefly.

The best account of the incidents concerning General Lafayette's attempted escape are contained in a pamphlet of some 49 pages in length, entitled "Olmutz" written by Miss Elizabeth Pinckney Huger, a daughter of Col. Huger, based on the personal narration and conversations of the Colonel himself. It was printed by Walker, Evans & Cogswell, 3 Broad Street, Charleston, S. C. The date of printing is not given, but on page 42, there is a reference to the Magazine of American History of June, 1881, and as Miss Huger died in 1882 it must have been printed in 1881 or 1882. This account of the events is to a large extent copied from "Olmutz" but considerably abridged.

The pamphlet "Olmutz" is not only out of print but is practically unobtainable. Therefore I have had this summary of the pamphlet printed for members of our family and friends.

*NOTE—The miniature is referred to and described in Dr. Jules Cloquet's book "Private Life of Gen. Lafayette", London, 1835, at page 16.

II.

The Hugers

As some of those who read this pamphlet may wish to know more about the Huger family I have added a brief sketch, which follows.

The Hugers were Huguenots, living for several generations at Loudun, in the department of Vienne. Feeling the persecution which people of their faith were being subjected to, they decided to leave France for America. The date is fixed by an entry in an old chronicle, which says: "Daniel Huger, marchand, sa femme et deux enfans sortis de l'Isle de Ré en 1682". This was none too soon to leave as the Edict of Nantes was revoked in 1685. This Daniel Huger settled in the Carolinas and was the founder of the American family of Huger. He died on his plantation at Wambaw, Santee, December 24th, 1711. His son Daniel Huger, who was married four times, had four sons by his second wife, Mary Cordes, as follows:

1. Daniel Huger, of whom I shall say more later.

2. Isaac Huger, who had a distinguished career in the War of the Revolution. He was made Lt. Col. of the 1st Regiment of the South Carolina Line of the Continental Army in 1775, Colonel of the 5th Regiment in 1776, and Brigadier General in the Continental Army in 1779, and served with distinction to the end of the war. He was severely wounded at Stono Ferry, on June 20, 1779, and again at Guilford, on Mar. 15, 1781.

3. John Huger, who was member of the Commons House of South Carolina, a member of the Council of Safety of South Carolina during the Revolution, Intendant of Charleston and later Secretary of State of the State of South Carolina.

4. Benjamin Huger, the father of Francis Kinloch Huger, who was a member of the Provincial Congress and a Major of the 5th South Carolina Continentals. He was killed on the lines before Charleston on May 11, 1779.

There was another son of the above mentioned Daniel Huger, by Ann Le Jau, his fourth wife, namely Francis Huger, who was a Captain in the 2nd Regiment of South Carolina Continentals in 1775, and who from 1777 to 1778 was a Lt. Col. and Deputy Quartermaster General for the Army in the South.

The Hon. Daniel Huger, (see 1. above), the eldest son of Daniel Huger and Mary Cordes Huger, was born at Limerick Plantation, on the Cooper River, February 20, 1741/2, and was married in Philadelphia, November 1st, 1772, to Sabina Elliott, (b. 1758, d. 1799), the daughter of William Elliott. Mrs. Huger's sister had already married in 1783 Col. Lewis Morris, and their daughter Sabina Morris subsequently married Robert Walter Rutherfurd. Mr. Daniel Huger was a member of the Governor's Council of South Carolina in 1780, a member of the Continental Congress 1786-1788, and a member of the U. S. House of Representatives 1789-1793. He died in 1799, the same year as his wife. Daniel Huger and Sabina Elliott Huger had five children:

1. Boone Huger b. 1773 and died in infancy.

2. Sarah Elliott Huger b. 1775, never married.

3. Ann Barnett Elliott Huger, b. 1777, married General Edward W. Laight of New York.

4. Daniel Elliott Huger, b. 1779, of whom I shall say more later.

5. Sabina Elliott Huger, b. 1781, m. 1815, d. 1845. She married John Wells, III., of New York, (b. 1770, d. 1823) the distinguished lawyer, whose monument is in St. Paul's on Broadway. Mr. John Wells's first wife was Eliza Lawrence, daughter of Thomas Lawrence, of Newtown, Long Island; they were married in 1796 and she died in 1812.

Daniel Elliott Huger, (see 4 above) had a very distinguished career. After graduating from Princeton he was admitted to the South Carolina Bar in 1799, he was commissioned a Brigadier General in 1814 in the South Carolina State Troops, but as the war of 1812 came to an end before his brigade was actually raised, he never actually served. He was a member of the South Carolina Legislature in 1811 and again in 1830, he became a Circuit Judge in South Carolina in 1819 and served for several years, when he resigned to re-enter politics. He was a member of the Conventions of 1832 and 1852, and a U. S. Senator from 1842 to 1845, when he resigned, as he did not care for the life in Washington. Mr. Calhoun succeeded him as Senator. He married in 1800 Isabella Izard Middleton, whose father was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. An account of the life of Judge Huger is given in O'Neall's "Bench and Bar of South Carolina," Vol. 1, p. 180.

The later generations of Hugers have also in many cases led

notable lives but I feel I have told enough to give an idea of their many activities. They intermarried from time to time, with all the notable families of South Carolina, such as the Middletons, the Manigaults, the Lowndes, the Izards, the Rutledges, the Mason-Smiths, the Ravenels, etc., etc.

The Elliott family of South Carolina, the family of the mother of Mrs. Wells, had obtained important grants of land in South Carolina and Georgia prior to 1700. One of the family moved to Georgia in 1754, and founded the Georgia branch of the family, and one of his descendants was U. S. Senator from Georgia from 1819 to 1825. Other members of that family were the Rt. Rev. Stephen Elliott, first Bishop of Georgia (b. 1806, d. 1866), and Gen. Stephen Elliott, of Beaufort, a distinguished officer of the Confederate Army.

There were among the Wellses, Edward Laight Wells and Sabina Huger Wells having no Huger blood. There was among the Hugers a John Wells Huger having no Wells blood. All of which shows that there were always ties of great love and affection between all the Wellses and all the Hugers. These were not lessened by Edward Laight Wells going from New York and joining the Confederate Army where he fought very gallantly 'till the end of the war, and was severely wounded at Trevillians. After the war he married a Miss Mason Smith, whose mother was a Huger.

These notes are written to recall events of the past which the present and future generations should know, so that the memory of old ties and affections between the Wellses and the Hugers may be known by our children, and old family traditions preserved.

I claim no originality for what I have said. I have taken nearly the whole story of "Olmutz" as it was told except that I have shortened it. In regard to the Hugers I owe almost all to the great kindness and help of Mr. D. E. Huger Smith, of Charleston, to whom I tender my most sincere thanks.

New York, March 7th, 1931.

T. TILESTON WELLS, Litt. D.